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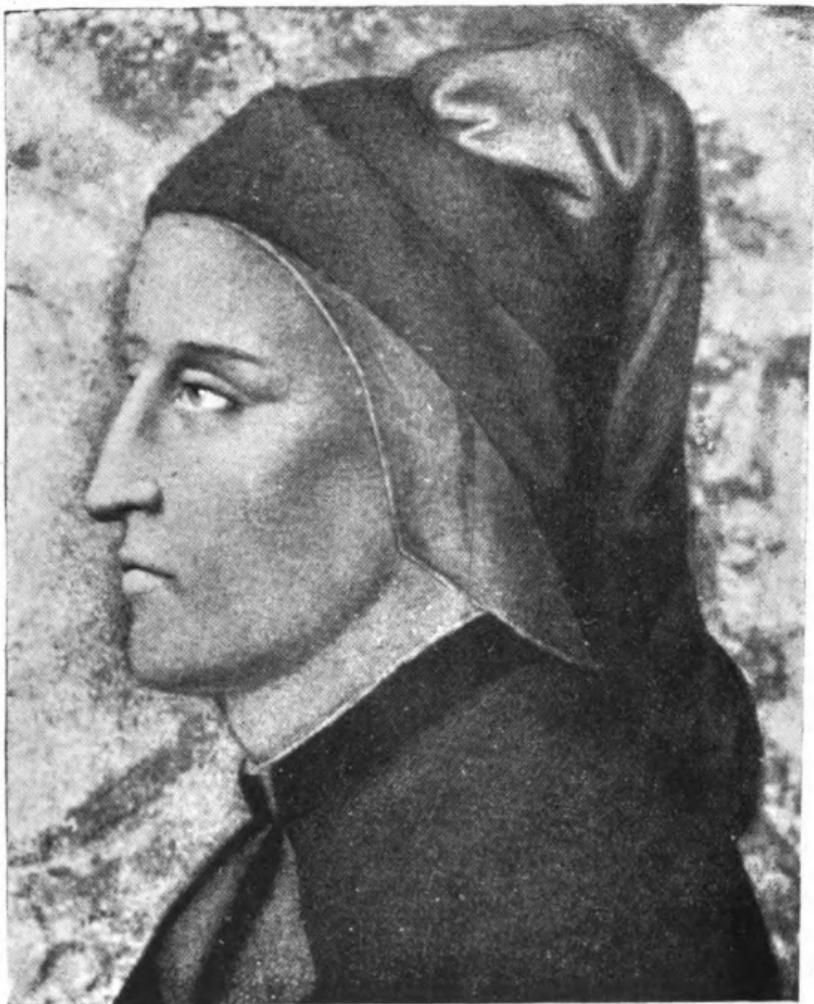
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VIEUSSEUX'S
LA VIECCHE ETTE
TELORENEE
DE LA
SALLE DEPARTMENT

DANTE



DANTE.

(From the portrait by Giotto in the Bargello, Florence.)

2442
Dante

RE
HANS SIEGMUND WEXLER
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CLASS 11

1. *What is the meaning of the term "class" in the context of the Indian Constitution?*

E. D. Bowden
Thurman 1903
Dante

By

HENRY SEBASTIAN BOWDEN

Priest of the Oratory

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY
69 Southwark Bridge Road
London, S.E.
1901

This little book is in part compiled from ^{drawn} Hettin-
ger's "Dante," edited by H. S. Bowden.

We are indebted to Messrs Alinari, of Florence,
for permission to reproduce as frontispiece their
photograph of the Giotto portrait of Dante.

The quotations from the "Commedia" are, as
a rule, from Cary's translation.

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Dante



I—Life of Dante

THE thirteenth century presents some marked and striking contrasts. We see in strange conjunction, Christendom united in the ranks of the Crusaders, and its civil head, the emperor, himself under ban of the Church ; Theology perfected by the genius of St Thomas, and the widespread Pantheism of Arabian philosophers ; sanctity renewed by St Dominic and St Francis, and the wild profligacy of the Cathari and kindred sects ; a general revival of the arts, and outbursts of savage barbarism ; the sublime sequences of the *Dies Iræ* and the *Stabat Mater*, and the scurribilities of the troubadour love-songs ; the Holy Roman Empire claiming universal jurisdiction, nationalities assert-

ing their independence, and the urban democracies in revolt.

In this age of contrasts, in the year 1265, Dante was born, and his life and his works reflect its lights and shadows. Florence, his birth-place, had been long the very centre of the strife between Guelphs and Ghibellines, the supporters respectively of the Church's liberties and the imperial pretensions. Dante's ancestors were Guelphs. The most important of them, Cacciaguida, married a lady of Ferrara, Aldighiera of the Aldighieri, and tells in the "Commedia" (Par. xv, xvi) his own story, and how he died in a Crusade and came from martyrdom to this peace, "e venni dal martiro a questa pace" (Par. xv, 148).* Dante's father was a professor of law, and apparently possessed a moderate but sufficient income. His mother, Donna Bella, died during his infancy, and his father does not seem to have long survived her. Yet Dante, though young, independent and with easy means,

* He fell in the second Crusade, which was preached by St Bernard, 1146-7

did not, "as many noble youths do now-a-days," says Boccaccio, "form habits of idleness and vice, but from his boyhood gave himself indefatigably to study, heedless alike of cold and heat, of food and sleep or of any bodily discomfort. His special predilection was for the Latin poets. He valued those authors, not only as models of style, but, especially in the case of Virgil, as teachers of deep natural truths. But," continues Boccaccio, "above all else he devoted himself to learn in reality the hidden things of heaven; and he arrived in theology at such a knowledge of the nature of God and of the angels as is far beyond the mind of man."

This strange seriousness and detachment finds its explanation in an event which took place when Dante was but nine years old, and furnishes the key to his whole life and above all to his great work. It was on the first of May, in the full beauty of an Italian spring, and a day when all Florence was in festa, that he was taken to an entertainment at the house of a neighbour, Folco Portinari.

There he was set to play with children of his own age, among whom was a child of eight years old, Bice or Beatrice, the daughter of his host. She seemed to him the type of all that was lovely, graceful and attractive, yet withal possessed of a rare modesty and gravity of speech. Her delicate features shone with such an angelic purity as to destroy of itself everything corrupt. With the sight of Beatrice began Dante's "*Vita Nuova*," for the love of her possessed his mind, and led him ever to higher things.

During his earlier youth, Dante seems to have pursued his studies undisturbed by political strife. His chief instructor was Brunetto Latini, a philosopher of great repute, the author of the "*Tresor*," a kind of encyclopædia of all the sciences, yet at the same time a poet and statesman, and holding the office of secretary to the republic. Dante expresses his gratitude to Brunetto for his valuable and patient teaching "hour by hour" (Inf. xv, 82-85). The earliest and

most intimate friend of Dante appears to have been Guido Cavalcante. "Mio primo amico," Dante calls him; and to him the "Vita Nuova" is dedicated. He, too, was one of the first creators of Italian lyric poetry. Rich, highly gifted, a bold soldier and an ardent Guelph, Guido was a prominent personage in Florence in Dante's time. But by a strange turn of events, Dante, then his political opponent, seems to have had part in sending him into exile. He died in 1300. A later friend was another lyric poet, Cino da Pistoja. He was a professor of law, and seems to have won Dante's friendship by responding in verse to his first sonnets.

The thirteenth century witnessed a new birth of painting as of poetry. In the circle of the proud (Purg. xi, 79) Dante recognizes Oderigi of Gobbio, the celebrated miniature painter, who tells him that he is expiating the vanity enkindled by his art; and adds that "even there he would not be," but that "while able still to sin, I turned to

God." Two finely illuminated missals in the Canonico at St Peter's are ascribed to him. Oderigi praises Francesco Bolognese as having eclipsed his own fame, and Giotto as having surpassed Cimabue. We learn from a passage in the "Vita Nuova" that Dante himself was a painter. "On the first anniversary of the day," he says, "on which this lady (Beatrice) entered into life eternal, I was engaged in designing on certain tablets an image from her memory." But, apart from this direct statement, the details of measurement and proportion given in the construction of the three kingdoms; the minute images drawn from nature and the descriptions of form and colour, of light and shade, ever recurring in his works, show him to have been no stranger to the arts of sculpture, architecture and painting.

Many passages in the "Commedia" manifest Dante's love of music and singing. He tells how the words of the *Te Deum* mingled with the sweet harmony just as the choir's chant is lost at times in the

organ's sound (Purg. ix. 139-145); of a burst of Hosannas, ne'er forgotten (Par. viii, 29); of the threefold *Gloria* to the Holy Trinity, "in itself a reward for every merit" (Par. xiv, 28-33). This love of music is indeed to be expected, for lyric poetry at that period in Italy was always intended to be sung. Dante, therefore, must have composed his own canzoni with a view to their being set to music; and we learn that the air for the canzone, "Amor che nella mente mi ragiona," whose thrilling sweetness entranced the poet (Purg. ii, 106-114) was composed by Casella, a famous singer of the day and an intimate friend of Dante.

After further pursuing his studies at the great centres of philosophy, literature and art—Padua and Bologna—Dante made his first recorded appearance in public life, in 1289, at the battle of Campaldino (Purg. v, 92); where the Florentine Guelphs, to which party the poet belonged, defeated the Tuscan Ghibellines. Dante was now in his twenty-fourth year, yet he speaks of himself as being

then "no child in arms," and he had probably already seen active service. He was present at the siege and capture of the Pisan fortress of Caprona in the same campaign, and has described (Inf. xxi, 94-96) the fear of the surrendered garrison as they marched out between their captors, expecting each moment to be slain.

At some time within the next decade Dante married Gemma di Mamerotto Donati, of the great Florentine family of that name, a kinswoman of Corso Donati, a prominent Guelph leader, whose brother, Forese Donati, Dante places in purgatory, in the circle of the gluttonous, for his apparently sensual life. Dante had four children—two sons and two daughters. Little is known of his married life, which in any case was merged in the political career now commencing.

After Campaldino, the strife between the nobles and the burghers or citizens waxed strong in Florence; and in 1293 the nobles were excluded from office by the so-called decrees of justice, and municipal office could

only be obtained by inscription in one of the popular guilds. In 1295, the first year of the pontificate of Boniface VIII, Dante was enrolled in the guild of physicians and apothecaries, for which he was well qualified by his scientific education. Apothecaries in Dante's time were also booksellers, and men of learning were affiliated to their guild, as were also artists.

In 1300 Dante rose to the head of affairs as one of the six priors who were annually chosen for two months for the government of Florence. But a new strife arose between the Whites and Blacks, which eventually led to his downfall. The feud, though primarily a family quarrel between the Guelph Cancellieri and wholly unpolitical, eventually developed into a fresh contest of Guelphs and Ghibellines; the Whites, to whom Dante attached himself, siding with the Ghibellines, the Blacks with the Guelphs. The Whites at the time we are speaking of were the most powerful party, and obtained the expulsion of the Blacks from Pistoja;

but Charles de Valois, at the invitation of Boniface VIII, was now approaching Florence, and Dante was sent on a "White" embassy to Rome to protest against the French interference. During his absence Carlo Donati captured the city, opened the gates to Charles, and the Blacks seized the reins of government. On January 27, 1302, Dante, with four other leaders, was condemned to perpetual exile, under pain of being burnt alive if he attempted to return.

At Siena, on his way back from Rome, Dante learnt his fate. He was a homeless, almost destitute, exile. His wife, a kinswoman of Corso Donati, had managed to save some portion of his property, and remained with her children in Florence. Dante therefore was alone. He has told us himself of the trials of his future wandering life: "After it had pleased the citizens of that most fair and favoured daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth from her sweet bosom where I was brought up to the prime of life, and where, with all peace to her, I long to rest

my weary soul and finish the time allotted me, I have passed through almost all the regions to which this language extends, a wanderer, almost a beggar. . . . Truly I have been a ship without sail or helm, carried about to divers harbours, gulfs and shores by that parching wind which sad poverty breathes ; and I have seemed vile in the eyes of many who perchance from some fame had imagined me in other form ; in the sight of whom not only did my presence become naught, but all work of mine less prized, both what had been and what was to be wrought.”*

For the remaining nineteen years of his life Dante's wanderings were to continue. The Whites made several attempts to capture Florence and regain the mastery, but four years of repeated failures, chiefly due to their internal dissensions, proved the hopelessness of their cause. Dante abandoned his connection with them in scorn and despair, and “became a party by him-

* “Convito,” i, 3. Church’s “Dante,” p. 76.

self alone." In 1306, while the guest of Count Malaspina at Lunigiana, he received, according to Boccaccio, a manuscript from Florence containing, it is supposed, the first four cantos of the "Inferno" written in Latin. For the following five years he was absent from Italy, and probably during this period he made a lengthened sojourn at Paris and, according to some, visited Oxford. During this time Italy was devastated by party strife, anarchy and bloodshed, and in the election of Henry VII as Emperor of Germany Dante saw its divinely-appointed deliverer. He wrote to him therefore an impassioned letter entreating him to overthrow the Goliath (Florence) with the sling of his wisdom and the stone of his might, and to make an united Italy even by force of arms. Henry was crowned in the Lateran (1312), but the task of subduing the country was beyond his power, and he died at Pisa, fever-stricken and disappointed (1313).

After the emperor's death, Dante, who

had returned to Italy in 1310, and had to find hospitality where he could, appears to have resided for two years, 1314-1316, at Lucca with Uguzzione della Faggiuola, governor of that city. In 1315 Uguzzione obtained a victory over the Florentines at Montecatini, in consequence of which Dante was again condemned to banishment and death, and in this sentence his sons were included. A successful revolt of Lucca against Uguzzione deprived Dante of his asylum, and after various wanderings he repaired to Can Grande at Verona, a former friend and host. About this period an amnesty was offered to the banished Florentines, but on condition of appearing in chains as public penitents with a lighted taper in hand. To terms so humiliating Dante sent a noble and dignified refusal. With this farewell letter his connection with Florence was ended.

At the palace of Can Grande della Scala any distinguished Guelph or Ghibelline found a hospitable welcome, and Dante was received with all honour. Whether his re-

lations with his host were always of a cordial character is hard to determine. By some Dante's bitter complaint of "the salt savour of others' bread and the hard passage descending and climbing by others' stairs" (*Scala*) is held to refer to his residence with La Scala; but whatever differences may have arisen, Dante declares himself as fast bound by ties of sacred friendship with Can Grande.

In 1317 Dante, on the invitation of Guido Novello da Polenta, Lord of Ravenna, repaired to that city, and it remained his home to the end. Once only he interrupted these last years of retirement to attempt a negotiation between Verona and Venice. On his return from Venice, where he had been conducting the negotiations, he was attacked by a grave malady which proved fatal. Boccaccio thus describes his death: "After he had humbly and devoutly received all the last holy Sacraments, according to the rites of the Church, and had made his peace with God, he gave back his weary soul to his Creator on September 14, being the Feast of the Exalta-

tion of the Holy Cross, to the great grief of Guido and the people of Ravenna. All his earthly troubles ended, he was doubtless received into the arms of his noble Beatrice with whom we trust he is now enjoying everlasting bliss in the presence of Him who is the Supreme Good." Dante died in his fifty-seventh year, 1321.

Boccaccio describes the poet as of dark complexion, black hair, with a sad and thoughtful face; so that the women at Verona spoke of him as "the man who had been down to hell, and was begrimed with its heat and smoke." In manner he was courteous and restrained, given to silence, abstemious in diet, a lover of solitude, so pre-occupied with study that when engaged on a book in an apothecary's shop, he was totally unconscious of a tournament, with its shouts and dancing, taking place in the street. On the other hand, that he was proud and scornful we know from his own lips; and it is in accordance with such qualities that he is reported to have made the following refusal

when offered the leadership of the embassy to Rome: "If I go, who shall remain; if I remain, who shall go?" Of a similar kind is his reply to the guests at Can Grande's table, who secretly hid the bones from their plates under Dante's chair, and on their discovery asked him if he were a bone merchant. "The dogs," he said, "have indeed eaten all their bones, but not being a dog, I could not eat mine"—a resentful rejoinder on his host's name, "Cane—dog." It has been said that Dante's writings betray little humour, and his subjects were indeed always too serious in themselves and too seriously treated to admit of the introduction of any comic vein; but in as far as humour means the power of finding unexpected congruities amidst great diversities, of inventing sudden surprises, of presenting an idea in new and grotesque relations, then examples of humour and keen satire will be found to abound in Dante's writings, especially in the "Inferno."

II—Vita Nuova—Convito—Minor Works

WE will now proceed to the consideration of Dante's works. They reveal to us far more of his genius and character than can be learned from legendary anecdotes or even from his external biography.

At the age of eighteen he had already composed canzoni and sonnets; and when he was twenty-six he put together thirty-one of these sonnets, ballads and songs, as a record of the "new life" begun with his love of Beatrice. Hence the work is entitled "Vita Nuova." The poems are set in a prose context, narrating the incidents and visions which inspired them, with explanatory comments.

As a record of love, human indeed, but purified and spiritualized in its gravity and tenderness, in its earnestness and simplicity, its quaint but religious mysticism, its chivalrous attempts at concealment, its precious

but rare joys at a smile, salutation or glance—for the lovers never spoke—in its sensitiveness and pain under a rebuff, its humiliation under ridicule, its childlike confession of unfaithfulness through the attraction of other beauty, inferior indeed, but present and tangible, its final triumph in eradicating every vicious or disordered thought, till detached from every earthly tie, Dante had but one hope, to see Beatrice in glory—in all these and many other respects the “Vita Nuova” stands perhaps alone.

The whole work as it left Dante’s hands was one continuous piece; but it has since been variously divided, and may be conveniently summarized under three heads :

I.—The instantaneous trembling of every fibre of his body at the first sight of the “glorious lady of his soul”; her complete empire over his whole being; the penetrating, awful thrill when their eyes met; her salutation in itself a guerdon of everlasting life; his anguish, sadness, sorrow, when love as a terrible lord bears her away; meeting of

Dante and Beatrice in church at a discourse on our Lady; his feigned love of other ladies to screen his true devotion; her salutation denied him; his living death; mocked by Beatrice at a wedding feast; attempt to shame himself out of a love thus humiliated; his only relief composing sonnets, expressing the joys and sufferings of love and the praise of Beatrice.

II.—The death of Beatrice's father; Dante's sorrow and sympathy; visions of Beatrice herself as dead; the angels bearing her to heaven in a white cloud, singing "Hosanna in excelsis"; sight of the Lady Giovanna preceding Beatrice, even as the Baptist preceded the true Light; sonnets in praise of Beatrice's spiritual perfection and his own unworthiness.

III.—Death of Beatrice; "Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua gentium"—he had just completed a stanza in honour of his love "when the Lord of justice summoned that most blessed being to triumph under the banner of the blessed

Queen of Heaven, whose name was ever had in deepest reverence by the lips of that sainted Beatrice"; her mystical connection with the number nine: she died on the ninth day of the ninth month, when the perfect number was nine times completed (October 9, 1281), when the nine moving heavens were in the most perfect conjunction; but more, the number was her very self; three of itself is the factor of nine, and since the great Factor of miracles is of Himself three—Father, Son and Spirit, three in one—the lady was accompanied by the number nine, to show that she was a nine, that is a miracle, whose only root is in the adorable Trinity; the desolation of the city at the death of Beatrice commemorated in a letter to its principal personages and in various sonnets; Dante designs angels on tablets in her honour; appearance of a beautiful young lady at a window; tempted again to unfaithfulness; sonnet to the "pitying eyes"; recalled to his only love by a vision of Beatrice; the pilgrims exhorted to mourn

for her ; a vision of her in heaven ; resolves if his life is spared to write of her what has never yet been written of any other woman, and prays to see her glory, who gazes on the Face of Him “qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus. Amen.”

Such is a brief and most imperfect summary of Dante's first work, and the key to its meaning is to be found, we think, not in the songs of the troubadours, but in the spirit of symbolism proper only to the Catholic faith. That symbolism finds its first warranty in the holy Scriptures, where the whole visible world is treated as a sign or mirror of the invisible, and man himself is the image of God. There the soul is the bride of Christ; physical beauty is but the expression of inward holiness, and all the objects and emotions of human affection but types of the purest spiritual love. “Disce,” says St Augustine, “amare in Creatore creaturam et in figura Factorem”—“learn to love the Creator in the creature, the Maker in His work.”

Now, this principle was fully realized in Dante's times, and it begot a habit of impersonating or presenting under natural images thoughts and emotions, and of spiritualizing objects of sense. Thus, not to mention lyric poets contemporary to Dante, in St Francis love is a potent warrior, who has wounded him to the heart in spite of all his armour. Poverty is a most beautiful lady, to whom all must pay homage. On the other hand, with Blessed Jacopone, his soul is a young maiden, wooed by five brothers, his five senses, but espoused to a great King, God Himself. In this allegorical spirit, then, Beatrice's corporeal beauty, of which we have no material description, but typifies her purity ; her death marks the absorption of all thought of her outward fairness in that of her grace and virtues ; finally, she is left glorified in heaven to guide Dante thither. How far real incidents were interwoven in the allegory it is impossible to determine ; but the explanation we have given finds support from the part

assigned to Beatrice in the “Convito,” and still more fully in the “Commedia,” as we shall see.

The “Vita Nuova” may then be regarded as an early sketch, vague and undeveloped, of the mighty work which was to follow, clear, defined and perfected, when the novice in the sacred science had become an equipped theologian.

The “Convito,” or Banquet, the second of Dante’s works, marks a change in the poet’s mind and style. “The fervent and passionate” tone of the “Vita Nuova” was due to his unripe years; what he now writes with youth gone by will be “temperate and manly.” The primary argument of the work is given as follows: Though all men have a natural desire of knowledge, and their ultimate perfection lies in its attainment, yet the majority, by reason of the cares of life, the paucity of studious persons to encourage them, and the consequent lack of stimulus to study, live intellectually starved. The mass feed on

the pastures of the brutes, on grass and acorns. Dante was himself of the common herd, but he fled from it, and his experience of the misery of their state, and of the sweetness on the other hand of the bread of angels, impels him to let others taste at least of its crumbs. This angelic food is philosophy, or a loving use of the wisdom which exists above all in God; for divine wisdom is of the divine essence, and exists in him perfectly and truly as it were by eternal wedlock. Divine philosophy is acquired by the elective habit, that is, a good and habitual choice. From the constant exercise of the will in the moral virtues springs happiness, which is nothing else than virtuous action. Happiness to a certain degree is found in the active life; more fully in the contemplative, where the highest faculty is exercised on the highest object; perfectly in heaven alone, where God is seen face to face.

Such then is the banquet Dante would prepare, but its purpose is apologetic as

well as didactic. The banquet must be served with clean hands, and therefore he will show that virtue, not sensual passion as some thought, had inspired his previous sonnets. In his mode of self-justification he follows the example of Boetius, whose "Consolations of philosophy" were composed to manifest the injustice of his exile, as well as to declare the praises of wisdom. The form of the Banquet, a verse text and prose commentary, like that of the "Vita Nuova," is also taken from Boetius' work, as is again the allegorical treatment of the subject. Whilst in the "Vita Nuova" Beatrice was his youthful love idealized, in the "Convito" she represents philosophy or virtue, now the ruling passion of his soul. Her countenance reveals the joys of paradise; her eyes represent the demonstrations wherein truth is beheld with certainty; and her smile typifies those persuasive arguments, in which truth is seen as it were through a veil. In the same manner Dante spiritually interprets every expression of love in all his

canzoni, however innocently employed. Yet how is his confessed unfaithfulness to Beatrice, as regards the lady at the window, to be explained? He explains now that she also was philosophy; but if so, how then a rival to Beatrice? Most probably this lady was a real person, and he deceives himself in representing her as merely an ideal. Yet from that inconsistency he was won back by his new and matured love of Beatrice as the higher wisdom from which he never after departed.

The fourth book of the "Convito" closes with a beautiful comparison of human life to an arch composed of three sections or periods. The first is adolescence, the period of increase of life dating from birth till the twenty-fifth year. The second period, youth, *Gioventù*, lasts twenty years, terminating, therefore, in the forty-fifth year; to this period belong maturity and perfection. The third period, old age, extends from the forty-fifth to the seventieth year, and should be characterized by a perfection illuminative

not only of oneself but of others, so that the soul opens out like a rose which diffuses abroad the fragrance generated within. These three periods complete the arch of human life whose appointed term is, according to the Psalmist, three score years and ten. Yet a fourth period remains, and that is decrepitude. In this the noble soul does two things. She returns to God as to the port whence she was launched upon the sea of this life, and she blesses the voyage which she has made, because it has been direct and good, and without the bitterness of storms. And as a good sailor on nearing port lowers his sail and forges slowly ahead as he enters, so should we lower the sails of our worldly occupations and return to God with all our mind and heart, and thus make our port with all gentleness and all peace. (iv, 28.)

The "Convito" was intended originally to consist of fourteen canzoni, but was eventually reduced to three. It displays immense learning in the philosophy, history,

literature, and science of the time, without, however, form or connection, the whole being subordinated to the special allegorical meanings of each canzone.

The "Convito," however, offers special interest because of the data it gives of the relations of Dante and St Thomas, and of the development of Dante's philosophical knowledge. The "envoy" to the third canzone is entitled "contra gli erranti," after the example, Dante says, of our good brother Thomas Aquinas, "del buono Fra Tommaso d'Aquino," who to one of his books, which he wrote for the confusion of all who stray from the faith, gave the name "Contra Gentili." He quotes "Thomas's" commentary on the ethics to the effect that "Moral philosophy prepares us for all the other sciences" (Conv. ii, 15). Again (iv, 8) he shows that the most beautiful branch which springs from the root of reason is discernment, because "Thomas" says in his "Prologue to the Ethics" that to understand the relations of one thing to another is the

special act of reason, and this is discernment (for the sense powers recognize things as separate units without perceiving their mutual dependence). Again (iv, 15), Dante says : "I have seen three horrible infirmities in the minds of men: one is natural conceit" (*naturale jattanzia*), which Thomas especially execrates by saying : "There are many of such presumptuous spirits, that they think they can measure all things with their intellect, esteeming everything to be true which appears so to them, and all that does not appear so to them as false—*Totam natu-ram divinam se reputant suo intellectu posse metiri*" (*Contra Gent.* i, 5).

The above quotations are, we believe, all the direct references to St Thomas's writings in the "Convito," and it is remarkable that there are none to the "Summa," for as St Thomas died in 1274, aged only forty-nine years, and the "Convito" was composed at least from twenty to thirty years after that date, the "Summa" must have been already in circulation, and would have solved many

of Dante's difficulties. We can only suppose that at that time he had not made it his study, or at least had not mastered its contents. The "Commedia," on the contrary, has been called the "Summa" in verse, and a comparison of the "Convito" with the "Commedia," especially with the "Paradiso," shows the immense influence of St Thomas's great work on the mind of the poet. At no time had Dante a shadow of doubt about the faith. "The holy Church, that cannot speak a lie"—la santa chiesa che non puo dire menzogna (Conv. ii, 4)—was ever his infallible guide. Miracles, the stumbling-block of the sceptic, were the primary foundations of his faith, "principaliSSimo fondamento della fede nostra," and in miracles he includes not only "those of the Crucified, but those afterwards done by His saints in His name." And it is the faith thus founded "which is of all things useful to the human race, for by faith we escape eternal death and gain eternal life" (ii, 7). All this is in the "Convito"; nevertheless, under

the Master's guiding hand in the "Commedia," he modifies or withdraws philosophic and scientific opinions expressed in his earlier work; clear definitions succeed to doubtful conjectures; less important subjects find their due subordination, and the whole realm of truth, natural and revealed, is treated no longer tentatively, but with the firmness, grasp and precision of an equipped theologian. Dante curiously ascribes St Thomas's death to poison, administered by order of Charles of Anjou (Purg. xx, 69). The king's hatred was due, it was said, to fear of the hostile influence of the saint at the Council of Lyons, about to be held (1274). The story was current in Dante's time, but has been long since discredited.

Dante prefers to write his commentary as well as his canzoni in Italian, not Latin, and amongst his reasons are the following: Latin is a lordly language, and a commentary should act as a servant. His work is for his countrymen at large, and not merely for the learned. By using the vernacular he

will manifest its beauty, and this will be made more apparent in simple prose than in poetry, enriched by rhyme, rhythm and external setting. Lastly, Italian is his own mother tongue and therefore most dear to him. It has been shamefully condemned by the Italians themselves; they will not see the smoothness of its syllables, the fittingness of its construction, the sweetness of its pathos, proofs in themselves of its soft and exquisite beauty. “*Si vedrà l'agevolezza delle sue sillabe, la proprietà delle sue condizioni, e le soavi orazioni che di lui si fanno: le quali chi bene aguarderà, vedrà essere piene di dolcissima d'amabilissima bellezza.*”

“*De Vulgari Eloquio*” is a later treatise on the origin and formation of language, and on the characteristics of the ideal Italian tongue with its application to poetry. This and the twelve letters ascribed to him and the two eclogues we pass by to consider the “*De Monarchia*” which embodies his theory of politics. The contents of the three books may be summarized as follows :

BOOK I.—God and nature make nothing in vain, but whatever power a being possesses exists for some operation, and the operation of each class of being is determined by its own specific faculty. Now the specific faculty of man is his potential intellect, “*intellectus possibilis*,” and the ultimate end of the human race is to set in operation the whole potentiality of that faculty. This end can only be attained by universal peace and the due maintenance of order, and to ensure this peace there must be one absolute and supreme ruler who, after the model of God in creation, binds in contented unity all mankind.

BOOK II.—The ancient empire of Rome, it is argued, was by nature and divine appointment universal and supreme; and as the Holy Roman Empire is its direct successor, the German Emperor is the one temporal ruler of the world.

BOOK III.—The emperor therefore holds his power immediately from God, and in absolute

independence of the Roman pontiff, and the contrary arguments of his opponents, drawn principally from the Holy Scriptures, are, as the author thinks, refuted.

Such, then, is Dante's theory, and its fundamental fallacies are apparent.

First, though temporal power, lawfully established and exercised, is directly from God, the form of government adopted and the persons in whom it is vested are the product of historic development. The Empire of Augustus was not then, *qua* empire, more a divine institution than the previous consular republic. Secondly, the representative of the ancient Roman Empire, so far as it had one, was not in Germany but at Byzantium. Charlemagne, the Frankish king, became emperor and Roman not by inheritance, but by other causes—by the act, for instance, of Pope Leo who consecrated him. Thirdly, in Dante's own theory, the jurisdiction of the emperor never could have been absolutely independent; for he says himself, that in certain matters the Roman prince is

subject to the Roman pontiff, “mortal happiness being, in a sense, ordered to that which shall not taste of death.” If, then, the temporal order is subservient to the spiritual, the jurisdiction of the emperor was, in its moral respect, subject to that of the Pope. What the Popes indeed claimed was not temporal but spiritual sovereignty. The office of the Pope as supreme judge of Christendom was recognized by ancient public law and the agreement of Christian nations; and it was their firm resistance to the ever-growing tyranny of emperors and feudal lords which alone saved the liberty of both Church and people. The effect of the Ghibelline theory of the subjection of the Church to the State could be seen in the Greek communion, and to no small extent in the Church itself during the Pope’s residence at Avignon. That Dante never contemplated the degradation of the Church to the level of a state establishment is evident from his describing the Holy See, when under the tutelage of France, as “una puttana sciolta”; but the

fact only shows the impracticability and unsoundness of his theory. From his axiom again that the Church's dominion is purely spiritual, heresiarchs like Marsilius, Wycliff and Huss, denied her right of possessing property, and consequently plundered her goods. Now, since the Church on earth is composed of human beings, to forbid her to possess is to forbid her to live or exist. It may be asked how Dante, being, as he repeatedly shows himself to be, a sincere Catholic, is found—politically, at least—in line with the Church's direst enemies? We think his position may be explained on public and private grounds. Democratic jealousy of power had reduced the term of municipal office in Florence to two months' duration, and for this only members of the guilds—no nobles—were eligible. The constant change of government, with its consequent strife and confusion, begot a desire for the strong and permanent rule, such as Dante believed the emperor's to be. On the other hand, the Pope and the French

party had, in his mind, driven him to exile and poverty ; and, proud and envious as he was, by his own self-confession, he could not but be their opponent. As champion of the empire, then, he could denounce his foes—not on personal grounds, but for the sake of religion and country. But his alliance with the Ghibellines was not for long. Their selfishness injured the imperial cause, he says, as much as the Guelph antagonism. And so he became a party by himself alone. It will be noted that the Utopia of Dante, Italy as a fief of the German Empire, has no relation to the united Italy, with Rome as its capital, which we are now called upon to admire.

We now come to Dante's great work, the "Commedia." Its relation to the "Vita Nuova" and the "Convito" has been of late years the subject of much discussion. According to De Witte, the "Vita Nuova" represents a state of pure, childlike faith ; the "Convito" that of doubt, begotten by the study of philosophy ; the "Commedia"

a return to God by casting reason aside. The theory is unsound in principle, for reason and faith can never be opposed; and Mr Wicksteed has shown, as we think clearly, that it is contrary to Dante's own statements; for it is Virgil (human reason or philosophy) who, at the command of Beatrice (divine wisdom) brings the errant poet to the gates of paradise. The parts of the trilogy, we believe then, stand thus: In the "Vita Nuova" Dante writes, as a lyric poet, of his youthful love; in the "Convito," as a philosopher, of that same love, as we have said, matured and reasoned; in the "Commedia" he deals with it in the light of theology, supernaturally developed to its perfection in the Vision seen face to face.

III—The Commedia

THE "Commedia" is cast in the form of a vision vouchsafed to the poet of the other world, for the benefit of his fellow men. Records of similar visions were by no means rare in Dante's time, and the subject of the unseen world was kept by the Church before the eyes of her children in her ritual and liturgy, while porch and apse displayed in sculpture or mosaics the terrors of the Last Judgement, the woes of the lost, and the joys of the blest. So again, the favourite theme of dramatic art was the mysteries of religion or scenes from the future life. Villani relates how, at a great representation of this kind at Florence in 1304, the bridge over the Arno broke down, and many lives were lost. Dante, then, selected for his theme the dominant ideas of his time, nor except by such means could he hope to obtain a hearing; but his genius was seen in re-

casting the old matter and in moulding a masterpiece out of the rude clay.

The form of the poem is cast on a theory of numerical mysticism, based on the numeral three and its multiples. Each of the three kingdoms has three times three—that is nine—gradations. The three principal divisions of the poem each contain thirty-three cantos, besides the introductory canto. Thus the total number is one hundred, or ten times ten—ten signifying completeness.

The metre chosen by Dante for the melody to which it was to be set is again built on the number three, the triple rhyme—terzina, or terza rima. It consists of eleven syllabled iambics, in stanzas of three lines, or triplets, linked continuously by the central line, which always rhymes with the first and third lines of the following stanza. The chain thus formed is terminated at the end of each canto by a single verse “ritornello,” which again rhymes with the middle line of the last stanza. The euphony of this

double rhyme is unattainable in any translation.

As with Dante things visible symbolize the invisible, so the written word has, besides its literal, a figurative or mystical sense. The theme of the "Commedia," taken literally, is the state of souls after death. Considered allegorically, its subject is man and the rewards or punishments he meets with as the fruit of his own free acts for good or evil; and this involves the scheme of God's government, the purpose of human life, and the proper end of Church and State.

The setting forth of such a scheme is indeed a mighty task, and Dante trembles at the prospect. But Cacciaguida urges him to cast aside all equivocation, proclaim the truth boldly, and bring it home by palpable instances and proof apparent; for the truth, though bitter at first, will in the end give vital nourishment.

The time and dates chosen for the action of the poem have also their place in the allegory, and are thus interpreted by

Hettinger. On the night of Holy Thursday, March 24-25, 1301, being himself "in the midway of life"—that is, in his thirty-fifth year—the "summit of the arch," Dante lost himself in the gloomy wood. On the morning of Good Friday, March 25, he arrives at the base of the "sunlit mount." Now, in 1301, according to Florentine computation, New Year's Day, as well as Good Friday, alike fell on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation. On this day then, Dante, lost in sin, is to find through the Incarnation and Passion, in the New Year, a new birth. On the evening of Good Friday he enters hell with Virgil; on the evening of Holy Saturday they reach the Giudecca, its lowest depth. At half-past one o'clock on Easter morning they stand before the entrance of the great cavern leading to the other hemisphere. On Easter Monday, an hour and a half before daybreak, they arrive at the foot of the mount of purgatory, and again see the stars. From Monday to Friday in Easter week Dante is passing through

purgatory; on the Friday and Saturday he traverses the seven heavens, and on Sunday, Low Sunday, he ascends to the empyrean.

Thus, of the whole ten days, four nights and three days are spent in hell; four days and three nights in purgatory, and three days and three nights in heaven. The beatific vision is vouchsafed to him on the seventh day from his entrance to purgatory, seven signifying "rest in God."

The prelude, or the opening cantos of the "Inferno," furnishes of itself the key to the poem. Man, in the person of Dante, finds himself in a dark wood, blind and impotent through the loss of grace. The mere memory of his degradation is scarcely less bitter than death, but he will relate all he saw, to show the manner of his deliverance. How he strayed so far he cannot tell; he was so full of sleep, so drugged by sloth, when he left the true way. He reaches a hill, and encouraged by its sunlit summit, begins the ascent. His attempt is vain, for he is

driven back in turn by three beasts—the leopard, the lion, and the wolf—the types respectively of the triple concupiscence, lust, pride and avarice, masters of every soul in a state of sin. Vanquished and despairing, he finds fresh hope in the sight of a venerable figure which draws near. This is Virgil, sent by Beatrice, who again receives her mandate from Lucia, and she again from a noble and blessed Lady, most like "her divine Son in glory." The blessed Lady is the Mother of God, and as man cannot prepare himself for grace or for any supernatural act, our Lady, as the "Mater misericordiæ," obtains for Dante, first the preventient, illuminating grace, symbolized by Lucia, then the grace which moves the soul to act, typified by Beatrice. Thus Virgil, as representing natural reason, is only enabled by the aid of actual grace to guide the poet through hell and purgatory and teach their warning lessons. On leaving purgatory Virgil's office ceases, for Dante passes to a supernatural state, and needs

a heavenly guide to conduct him to paradise.

External to hell itself, but within its portal, Dante finds a multitude of souls who had lived "without blame or praise." Amongst them are the angels supposed by him to have held aloof in the battle of the heavenly hosts. All these "anime triste" from cowardice or indolence had striven while alive to hold a neutral place, and as neutrality towards God and His truth is rebellion, for "he who is not with Me is against Me," they are condemned as rebels to hell. They are a "caitiff crew," and Virgil bids Dante not to speak to them "ma guarda e passa"—"but look and pass by." The scientific agnostic with suspended judgement and chronic doubt would not, it seems, have been placed by Dante in the empyrean.

According to the inscription on the portal, Hell was a work of divine justice, but as all the works of God, *ad extra*, are common to the holy Trinity, each of the divine Persons is named as co-operating in

its creation. The omnipotence of the Father strikes down all who oppose His will; the wisdom of the Son ordains punishments proportionate to the sinner's deserts; and the love of the Holy Ghost, "il primo amore," demands their infliction. To understand the action of love in the scheme of divine retribution we must know something of Dante's idea of the purpose and government of the universe, as shown in the "Commedia."

Not for the increase of Himself, for He is infinite, but to shed His glory forth, and that in His reflected brightness each might say, "I am," God in His goodness willed things to be (Par. xxix). Every creature, then, is a reflection of a divine exemplar, each with "special lustre bears the ideal stamp imprest." And this likeness to its Maker is found not only in individuals or species, but in creation as a whole, for all things are ordained in mutual relation and dependence. The nine choirs of angels rule the nine celestial spheres, and through them

control the elements and all material substances. Thus the divine power, one and undivided in itself, is manifested in different degrees through creation, just as the soul, though one, is disclosed in the different members of the body with more or less clearness.

But creatures are not like to God in their nature only, but also in their action. The motive principle implanted in all things is love or inclination to the good; and God being the universal Good and the source of all goodness, all things naturally tend to Him. Through the "vast sea of being" this principle holds good. What "binds the earth together and makes it one" is love, or the natural attraction of the whole and parts to their proper place. Instinct in lower creatures, rational love in the higher, bears each in their course to God. From this relation, then, of creatures to God in their being and action, flow unity and order, "the form by which the universe resembles God."

Where, then, does sin begin? The first

movement of love to the universal good, good as such—*amore naturale*—being necessary and natural, is always free from error, for, according to the axiom of philosophy, nature cannot err; but when the will loves freely—*amore d'animo*—that is, when the will chooses its own particular good, then error may begin. As long as the will is fixed on the first good—*il primo Bene*—God, and uses the second good—*i secondi*—creatures, in just measure—*se stesso misura*—as means to the end, no evil pleasure can follow. If, however, a man allows himself to regard a pleasurable object apart from reason, then he errs—*per malo obbietto*. By yielding to such an attraction—*falso piacere*—may the soul fall as a thunderbolt. Again, in his love of a lawful object he may err—*per troppo o per poco di vigor*—by excess or defect. And in all these three ways he sins in using against the Maker His own world—*contra il fattore adovra la sua fattura* (Purg. xvii, 102).

But all sins are not of the same gravity. They vary in guilt as they proceed from

frailty and disordered passion or from malice, and are committed by force or fraud. The most heinous sin is fraud, as it involves the abuse of reason, man's noblest gift. The worst kind of fraud is that of treachery to benefactors. The incontinent of all kinds, the lustful, gluttonous, avaricious and the wrathful, are punished less than the heretics and those who do violence to God by "denying Him in their heart and blaspheming Him." As, then, the guilt of sin is increased in proportion as it proceeds from the reason and will, or in other words is deliberate and voluntary, it is difficult to see how De Witte can hold that sins of thought are punished in purgatory, and only sins of act in hell. For with the rebel angels, all of whom are in hell, the evil thought and act are necessarily one and the same. External acts are possible for human beings with an outward and inward nature, but not for pure spirits. A spirit moves, speaks, acts by volition only. The effect of his act in the visible world would of course be external to the act itself;

but the act remains complete in the will, and the external result would in no way add to the original malice. Lucifer's sin of rebellion was involved in his sin of pride and completed when he thought "he would be like the Most High."

Of that fatal lapse the cause
Was the curst pride of him, whom thou hast
seen
Pent with the world's incumbrance.

—Par. xxix, 55.

The guilt of sin measures its crime as a disordered act. Man is subject to a three-fold order; within to that of reason, without to the State and the Church, in his civil and spiritual relations. Each of these orders being violated by sin, the sinner incurs a threefold penalty—in himself, remorse of conscience and despair; from his fellow creatures, the various tortures inflicted by them, as they have been the objects, instruments or accomplices of his sin—"pœna sensus"; and lastly, abandonment by God—"pœna damni." This triple punishment

is found in the "Inferno," and its infliction is appropriately attributed to the Holy Ghost, who, as the essential love and bond of unity in the Godhead, preserves order in creation and chastises all its transgressions. In the lowest depths of hell, in the jaws of the arch-traitor Lucifer, are Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed the emperor, and Judas, the betrayer of Christ.

The structure of hell is determined by Dante's view of sin, already given; as true love, like fire, ascends, so false love is by its own weight dragged down. In nine ever narrowing circles the lost souls are buried, the gravity of their guilt determining their depth in hell. At the apex of the inverted cone Lucifer is stuck fast, precipitated by his sin to the earth's centre, according to Dante's cosmogony the furthest point from God.

The condemnation of the damned is accomplished in three acts. First, in the inexorable light of God's judgement excuse is no longer possible, and they confess their

sins; but their confession is without repentance. Secondly, the sentence is pronounced, exactly proportioned to their degree of guilt; and thirdly, they are at once whirled to their proper abyss.

Dicono, e odono, e poi son già volte (Inf. v, 15).

A description more terse and dramatic is hard to conceive. The sufferings of the lost are drawn from all that the poet had seen of pain, famine, pestilence in the battlefield, in the fever hospitals, in the malaria plains, from the tortures inflicted by tyrants in every age, and from the old world myths and metamorphoses. Yet through all these realms of sorrow, once only Dante breaks into tears; and for this "senseless pity" Virgil immediately administers this sharp reproof: "Who more senseless than he who sorrows at the divine judgement?" (Inf. xx, 22-29.) For the guilty act has become a habit, and the sinner is punished because he is still sinning, blinded and hardened in his unrepentant will; and thus he suffers not

only for his past evil, but for the evil to which he is for eternity determined, according to the words "Let him that is filthy be filthy still."

With the same clear conviction of the necessary, essential antagonism between God and sin, Dante never allows any gifts of merits, personal affection, or party tie to lessen his sense of its malice, or of the penalty it involves. The patriot, philosopher and statesman, whether Guelph or Ghibelline, his beloved paternal tutor, Brunetto Latini, Francesca da Rimini, the object of his tears and pity, are one and all, as they died in mortal sin, plunged for ever into hell. And in this inflexible execution of the divine justice, Dante recognizes only the necessary manifestation of God's glory, accomplished by the primal love.

The motive of Dante's purgatory is two-fold. First, the infliction of the temporal punishment still due for absolved sin, because unaccomplished in this life. Secondly, the moral improvement which is acquired, not by

any change in the sinner's relation to God, for that is determined by the last act of Charity made "in via" (Purg. xi, 8), but by the removal of the obstacles to the exercise of that act, created by sin, and by the purging away of stains which sinful habits have left.

Mr Moore has laid stress on Dante's enlightened conception of purgatory, "compared" with the mechanical tablets for the equivalents for purgatorial penance "constructed by St Peter Damian and others." "Mechanical" can only mean that St Peter Damian believed that so many strokes of discipline, like the turn of a Buddhist prayer machine, of themselves, apart from any intention of the penitent, found acceptance with God. St Peter, of course, believed nothing of the kind. According to Catholic doctrine in all time, bodily mortification obtains meritorious or satisfactory value solely when done in a state of grace, and in union with the merits of Christ. Hence the pains of hell vindicate, but do not satisfy, the divine justice. Again, St Peter Damian's voluntary

penances were substitutes or “redemptions,” not for so much purgatorial pains, but for so much of the old canonical penances. What proportion of temporal punishment, or how many days’ duration in purgatory would correspond to a penance or indulgence of a hundred days, is for us, according to the teaching of theologians, altogether unknown. “Poor Damian,” therefore, never could have thought that he could have wiped out a century of purgatory in a year, but believed that he offered an equivalent for so much canonical penance. Dante, however, arithmetically computes his purgatorial penances according to our time; that is, he does the very thing which Mr Moore erroneously says St Peter did, but St Peter in fact did not. Thus of the holy souls in ante-purgatory, those who died excommunicated, but contrite, are detained for their neglect to be absolved thirty times as long as the term of their excommunication (*Purg.* iii, 139). The presumptuous who delayed their conversion till death do penance for a period corresponding

to that of their delay. The negligent of this class, who died by violence, remain in purgatory for a time equal to that of their natural life. Those who through the preoccupation of political cares deferred their repentance, do penance for twice that period.

As regards the kind of punishment inflicted in Dante's purgatory proper, the huge blocks of stone on the backs of the proud, the glowing flames enveloping the sensual, the goodly fruitage for ever beyond the reach of the gluttonous, the fetters binding the avaricious with their faces to the ground, seem to us as purely penal, and in that sense "mechanical," as the psalter and discipline of St Peter Damian.

While Dante's purgatory signifies primarily the purification of the departed soul, the imagery he has chosen portrays allegorically the moral purgatory by which the sinner is cleansed by penance in this life. Purgatory itself is entered by a door, with three steps in front, of divers colours, signifying respectively the three acts of the penitent

required for absolution. The lower, marble, white, smooth and polished, the examen of conscience ; the next, "more dark than sablest grain," cracked lengthwise and across, contrition ; the third, of "massive porphyry," "red as the life-blood spouting from a vein," the firm purpose of amendment. On the threshold sits an angel of God, who marks with his sword seven P's on the poet's brow, figures of the stains of the seven deadly sins, now to be expiated and cleansed. The angel then unlocks the door with Peter's keys, the one representing the judgement as to the penitent's fitness for absolution, the other the absolution itself.

In hell no sound of prayer was heard, no sanctifying image seen ; for hell would be hell no longer if the blessed names of Jesus or Mary could be uttered, or even the thought of them recalled. But in purgatory Mary appears as the soul's chief aid. As Dante traverses its seven circles, her seven virtues appear in appropriate sculpture, in contrast with the seven deadly sins, the

stains of which are to be wiped away. The proud see her humility in the Annunciation; the envious, her charity in the "vinum non habent" at the Cana marriage feast; the wrathful, her patience in the three days' loss; the slothful, her haste in the Visitation; the avaricious, her poverty at Bethlehem; the intemperate, her thought for others at Cana; the sensual, her "virum non cognosco" at the Angelic Salutation. Meanwhile "dolce Maria" and her hymns and canticles constantly resound. One poor tear—"una lagrimetta"—and Mary's name has saved Buon Conti at the point of death; angels, at her behest, rescue the soul when almost in the grasp of the tempter. But the Queen of Heaven herself is not to be seen till the highest heaven is reached.

In denouncing the sin of avarice punished in the fifth circle, Dante takes occasion to proclaim his devotion to the sovereign pontiff and his belief in the indissoluble union of Christ and His Vicar. The fact is the more remarkable because Dante regarded

the Pope in question, Boniface VIII, as his personal enemy, and in other parts of the "Commedia" anathematizes him for various supposed crimes. The outrage denounced by Dante was as follows: On August 8, 1303, Nogaret, vice-chancellor of Philip the Fair and Sciarra Colonna, with their followers surprised the Pope in his palace at Anagni. Forcing their way into his presence-chamber, they found the venerable old man, then in his eighty-seventh year, seated upon a throne in his pontifical vestments, his head bent over a golden crucifix which together with the keys he held in his hands. For a moment his great age and majestic silence disarmed his foes. Then they broke out into violent invectives, but without disturbing his calm dignity. Thirty-five days later the Pope died. Dante thus describes the sacrilegious scene :

To hide with direr guilt
Past ill and future, lo ! the flower-de-luce
Enters Alagna ; in His Vicar Christ
Himself a captive, and his mockery

Acted again. Lo ! to his holy lip
The vinegar and gall once more applied !
And he twixt living robbers doom'd to bleed !
Lo ! the new Pilate, of whose cruelty
Such violence cannot fill the measure up,
With no decree to sanction pushes on
Into the temple his yet eager sails !
O Sovran Master ! when shall I rejoice
To see the vengeance, which thy wrath, well
pleas'd
In secret silence broods ? (Purg. xx, 83-96.)

Before Dante leaves purgatory his final purification must be accomplished. This is effected by the sight of Beatrice standing on the banks of the Lethe, but with her features veiled. The angels intone the psalm "In te Domine speravi"; the dulcet strains melt his heart, and with new trust Dante confesses his former sins. To deepen his repentance, Beatrice herself relates to the angels the story of his past, his fitful love, notwithstanding her increase in virtue and beauty; his wayward wanderings after false images of good, making no promise perfect; his deafness to holy inspirations; his safety only

procured by the sight of hell, obtained by her prayers and tears. Dante, silent and confused as a child acknowledging its fault, at length loses consciousness in his shame. He awakes to behold himself immersed in the Lethe, where all memory of his past sin is obliterated, and he is allowed to see Beatrice face to face, and the splendour of the light eternal breaks upon him. At her bidding he is bathed in the Eunoe, whose waters renew his past merits, and he is fit for the ascent to the stars.

As the passage from hell to purgatory was marked by the change from darkness to twilight, from shrieks of anguish and despair to the strains of the Church's liturgy and devout petitions of faith and hope, so from purgatory to paradise Dante accomplishes his now lightning ascent amid the harmony of the spheres, the fires of divine glory, and the chaunts of the blessed choirs. As he ascends, the mysteries of life are solved, the smile of Beatrice becoming more radiant and her beauty more dazzling as each diffi-

culty is answered. Truth, he sees now clearly, is man's final object, and if it is unattainable every desire is vain. Inquiry (Dubbio) leads to its possession, and mounts, like the shoot, from point to point. But in questioning we must be guided by authority, and not wash at every fount.

How solemn is Beatrice's warning against mere curiosity and frivolous inquiry on sacred things :

Be ye more staid
O Christians ! not like feather, by each wind
Removable ; nor think to cleanse yourselves
In every water. Either Testament,
The Old and New, is yours : and for your guide
The shepherd of the Church. Let this suffice
To save you. When by evil lust entic'd
Remember ye be men, not senseless beasts (pecore
matte) ;
Nor let the Jew who dwelleth in your streets
Hold you in mockery. Be not as the lamb
That, fickle wanton, leaves its mother's milk
To dally with itself in idle play. (Par. v, 73-82.)

In the "Convito" Dante had said that the denial of immortality was "intra tutte le bestialità"—"of all brutishness the most stupid,

the most vile and the most damnable" (ii, 9.) His arguments there in support of a future life were the agreement of the wisest men as to the fact, the superiority of man to the brutes who are undoubtedly mortal, and the divination of dreams, by which he means the susceptibility of the soul to spiritual agencies when the external senses are unconscious in sleep (Cf. *Purg.* ix, 16). But above all he bases his faith on the words of Christ, "the way, the truth and the life." In the "Paradiso," however, following St Thomas, he treats the matter on firmer philosophical grounds. Beatrice had told him that the soul of man was immortal because created immediately by God, and then forestalls his objection that if this were so then the primal elements which were also immediately created by God should be immortal, and this evidently they are not. Therefore Beatrice says :

Now to content thee fully, I revert ;
And further in some part unfold my speech
That thou mayst see it clearly as myself

I see ; thou sayst, the air, the fire I see,
The earth and water, and all things of them
Compounded, to corruption turn, and soon
Dissolve. Yet these things also were create.
Because, if what were told me had been true
They from corruption had been therefore free.

(Par. vii, 121-126.)

To understand Beatrice's reply we must, as Dante says (Par. ii), launch into the deep, and understand something of the philosophy on which it is based. In the beginning, then, God created together matter and form, the undeterminable and determining elements ; and all corporeal beings are composed of these two constituents, and, as Dante teaches, elementary matter and its elementary formative principles will ever remain. The changes which we now witness in composite beings are effected by second causes producing successively in the primary matter successive substantial forms ; this universal movement and transformation are communicated through every grade of being from the cherub before the throne to the dust at our feet. In inorganic beings

these forms are produced by the influence of the heavens on the elementary principles "virtu informante" of the subject matter, the angels moving the stars as the smith does his hammer in fashioning new forms. In the lower grade of organic beings, plants and brutes, the vital principle is educed by the action of the stars from the potentiality of the matter disposed to receive it "di complessione tirata." These forms, being educed from matter and dependent on matter for their operation, are themselves material, and with death the plant or brute ceases to be. The soul of man, on the contrary, being immediately created by God, is intellectual and therefore immortal, and bears His seal immutably impressed. We have proof of this in man's freedom. He is wholly free : "libero a tutto" absolutely uncontrollable by things of change, and has for its object the eternal good God alone. True freedom consists in being thus exempt from subjection to transitory objects. As the human body was also created immediately by God and is

therefore the special object of the divine predilection, the resurrection of the flesh may be inferred as certain. The whole of Canto vii should be read ; we give only the concluding speech of Beatrice's :

The angels, O my brother ! and this clime
 Wherein thou art, impassable and pure,
 I call created, even as they are
 In their whole being. But the elements
 Which thou hast named, and what of them is made,
 Are by created virtue informed : create,
 Their substance ; and create the informing virtue
 In these bright stars that round them circling
 move.

The soul of every brute and of each plant,
 The ray and motion of the sacred lights,
 Draw from complexion with meet power endued.
 But this our life the eternal good inspires
 Immediate, and enamours of itself,
 So that our wishes rest for ever here.

And hence thou mayst by inference conclude
 Our resurrection certain, if thy mind
 Consider how the human flesh was formed
 When both our parents at the first were made.

(Par. vii, 125-144.)

In the heaven of the just kings who are
 grouped in the form of the eagle of Jupiter

another difficulty of Dante's is proposed and solved. How, he asks, can the exclusion from heaven of a heathen unbaptized but free from sin be consonant with God's justice? The question is thus put

A man
Is born on Indus' banks, and none is there
Who speaks of Christ, nor who doth read nor
write ;
And all his inclinations and his acts
As far as human reason sees, are good ;
And he offendeth not in word or deed ;
But unbaptized he dies and void of faith ;
Where is the justice that condemns him ? Where
His blame, if he believeth not ? (Par. xix, 66-74.)

The eagle replies : first, that though God has revealed Himself in many various ways in creation, yet the whole universe is but a partial expression of His glory, and His omniscience must always remain in infinite excess. Lucifer fell precisely because he did not realize this truth and the incomprehensibility of God. He would know all and at once. His pride forbade

his waiting the fuller light which would have been his, and so he "fell abortive."

Per non aspettar lume, cadde acerbo.
(Par. xix, 48.)

Our weaker minds can no more read the councils of divine justice than our eyes the depths of the unfathomable sea. But more, our very idea of justice comes from God alone, is but the feeblest reflection of His, and every true conception of what is just must correspond to the divine exemplar.

What then
And who art thou that on the bench would sit
To judge at distance of a thousand miles
With the short-sighted vision of a span?

(Par. xix, 74-77.)

If Dante still "subtilizes" on this subject he must be content to accept the supreme authority of Scripture. Such is the reply given by the mystic eagle, but Dante himself shows that all men, even heathen, can be saved by his placing in this very heaven of Jupiter the Emperor Trajan and Ripheus the Trojan, who died externally as Pagans

Mr Moore says that Dante here "seems to rise with happy inconsistency above the narrowness of contemporary belief" (*Studies in Dante*, second series, p. 39. 1899). We fail to see the alleged inconsistency, for Dante's teaching is in exact conformity with that of St Thomas, as Mr Moore himself admits. "God," St Thomas says, "never suffers anyone to want what is necessary to salvation if he only desires it. No one loses his soul save through his own fault, since God makes known to him truths which are essential to salvation, either through interior revelation, or, as in the case of Cornelius, by the voice of a preacher" (In iii Sent., d 28, 9, 3, a, 1, 2). It is curious indeed how often excellent Dante scholars, with every wish to be fair, go astray when dealing with the question of his religious tenets. Thus Miss Hillard regards him as "deeply imbued with Gnostic ideas" (*The Banquet*, p. xlviii 1889). Mr A. J. Butler says that anyone who has read "Meister Eckhart" "will be struck by the frequent and close resemblance,

not of thought only, but of expression and illustration which exist between him and Dante" (*Dante: His Times and His Work*, p. 46, 1895). Now the writings of Eckhart were judicially examined and were condemned, many of them as heretical, by John XXII on account of their pantheistic teaching. Fortunately we can learn from Dante himself who were his masters in the sacred science, scholastic or mystic, as also his attitude towards contemporary errors.

As then in Limbo, Aristotle, "the prince of reasoners," is the central figure of a group of philosophers, so in the heaven of the sun St Thomas, his interpreter of Aristotle, occupies the first place among the surrounding theologians. St Thomas is to Dante in theology what Virgil has been in the domain of reason, "his master and his guide." In all disputed points he follows the teaching of the "angelic doctor." He gives Averroes a place of honour in Limbo because of his historical importance, with the

descriptive phrase, "He who made the commentary vast." But he explicitly rejects Averroes's false interpretation of Aristotle and his Pantheistic errors. Thus he proscribes his doctrines of emanation, of the eternity of the world, and of one universal mind. Similarly he follows St Thomas on the substantial unity of man, and truth as being "il ben dell' intelletto"—"the supreme object and perfection of the human intellect." He declares himself against a false idealism in tracing the genesis of our knowledge from the perception of our senses, thus making it distinctly objected. Again, he follows the Thomist theory as to what constitutes the essence of beatitude.

Nor is he less clear and precise when dealing with affective theology. The chief errors of false mystics, Gnostic, Pantheist or of whatever kind, are mainly these: The power of man to attain to all knowledge by reason alone; his immediate intuition of the divine essence, and his ultimate absorption into the same, so that God and man become

one. Thus original sin, the need of grace, of revealed dogma, or of a divine teacher, are alike virtually denied. Now Dante places first before us in the "Inferno" the misery of fallen man and his absolute impotency to rise to higher things save through the aid of grace. Secondly, we learn in the "Purgatorio" the long penal process by which the soul must be cleansed before it is fit for God's presence. Thirdly, in the "Paradiso" itself, never for one moment are we allowed to forget the infinite distance which separates the creature from the Creator. In the full light of glory God remains still incomprehensible, and the ultimate transformation of the soul is effected not by a fusion of the divine essence with the human being, but by the union of their wills. Now this dogmatic accuracy in Dante is the more remarkable because the middle ages were fruitful in heresy, and in heresy subtle and widespread within the Church. We have only to look at the errors condemned on the doctrine of the Holy

Trinity, on the nominalist and realistic controversy, and on the pretensions of the new and rapidly advancing rationalism to learn the intellectual dangers of the day. And the leaders in error were not hostile opponents, Arian or Gnostic, but masters in theology like Amalric of Chartres and David of Dinant, Provincials of religious orders, such as Master Eckhart or bishops like Gilbert of Poitiers. Thus St Thomas warns Dante to be slow and prudent in what he affirms or denies, and bids him remember that as a rule the current or swiftly-formed opinion leaneth the wrong way, and that then conceit binds the intellect and makes retreat impossible. He has seen a ship, he says, make a straight and fast passage through her whole course and then founder at the harbour mouth.

And let this

Henceforth be lead unto thy feet, to make
Thee slow in motion, as a weary man,
Both to the "yea" and "nay" thou seest not.
For he among the fools is down full low
Whose affirmation or denial is,

Without distinction, in each case alike.
Since it befalls, that in most instances
Current opinions lean to false: and then
Affection bends the judgement to her ply.
(Par. xiii, 106, 115.)

That Dante followed this advice and advanced cautiously and, therefore, safely through the thorny paths of mysticism can be seen by the names of his chosen teachers. The first is St Bonaventure, who is in the same heaven with St Thomas, and pronounces the praise of the Dominicans as St Thomas had that of the Franciscans. Now it was St Bonaventure who, together with Richard and Hugh of St Victor, all proficient scholastics, systematized and elevated the mystical science. Another great mystic teacher of the poet was St Bernard, the prince of contemplatives, who finally replaces Beatrice, and intercedes for Dante with our Lady. From St Bernard he borrows much of his descriptions of the condition of the blessed, notably their desire for their reunion with their bodies and the state of the

soul in the highest kind of prayer. In his letter to Can Grande, Dante tells us that he drew his description of the ecstatic state and of supernatural contemplation from St Paul, St Matthew, Ezechias, Richard of St Victor (de contemplatione), St Bernard (de consideratione), St Augustine, Plato, St Boetius. If then to the scholastics Dante owes his precision and accuracy in dogmatic expression, so to the mystics he is indebted for that warmth of feeling and almost experimental knowledge of the spiritual world which lend a constant charm to his poem. Denunciation of worldly and vain preachers, of unworthy ecclesiastics, Pope, prelate or religious, recur again in the "Paradiso." Dante would have prelates—"magri e scalzi"—wan and barefoot like Peter and Paul, and he urges religious to return to their first observance. Yet he does not forget that religious orders are under the divine protection, and bids us remember that the God "who divided the Jordan and parted the sea" could yet renew their fervour.

Heaven is represented under various figures—as a tree which is always bowed down with perennial fruit and leaves; the banquet of the Lamb, wherein He ever feasts his own; a religious house of which Christ Himself is the Superior; a celestial Rome, “wherein Christ dwells a Roman.”

The condition of the souls of the blessed, their thoughts and affections, their relations towards each other and towards their friends on earth, are told with marvellous exactness and wealth of imagery. The blessed see all things in God, even what is future and hidden, just as in a mirror distant objects by reflection become present, or as the mathematician sees all members under the idea of the unit. This is so because all future things are now in the will of God as in the cause which gives them being. Things in God appear as clear and immutable as white and black on the written page. The effect of the beatific vision is indefectible. None who have seen God can turn from Him

again, for all that is good is alone whole and perfect in Him.

It may not be
That one, who looks upon that Light, can turn
To other object, willingly, his view.
For all the good, that will may covet, there
Is summed; and all, elsewhere defective found,
Complete. (Par. xxxiii, 95.)

The spiritual nature of heavenly joy is found in the theme :

There was sung
No Bacchus, and no Io Pæan, but
Three Persons in the Godhead, and in one
Person that nature and the human join'd.
(Par. xiii, 21.)

Though the blessed enjoy the vision in various degrees, yet none repine or envy those of a higher grade, for the will of all is absolutely one with the will of God. This unity in variety produces an effect like an exquisite harmony in music. While the essential joy derived from the Beatific Vision is unchangeable, the accidental joy of the blessed is increased in three ways. First, as each sees in God how the others love

Him, all rejoice in their mutual charity, and their happiness is increased with every soul that enters heaven. Again, they receive fresh accessions of love and joy from the truths imparted to them by the angels who have a deeper knowledge of the divine essence. Thirdly, their bliss is augmented by the efficacious prayers they can offer for their loved ones on earth. In another passage Dante shows how human ties abide in the blessed. In speaking of the resurrection of the flesh, he says the blessed desire reunion with their bodies, not only for their own sakes, but for their mothers and fathers and others dear to them :

Forse non pur per lor, ma per le mamme
Per li padri, e per gli altri che fur cari
Anzi che fosser sempiterne fiamme.

(Par. xiv, 64-66.)

The same thought is found in Shakespeare :

And, Father Cardinal, I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in Heaven :
If that be true, I shall see my boy again.

(King John III, iv.)

And now let us accompany the poet in his upward flight. Marvellous indeed is the swiftness of that ascent borne on by love. Past the "eternal pearl" of the first heaven of the religious torn from the cloister; past the thousand splendours of the ambitious humbled; past the hosannas of the sensual purified; past the "beaming suns," the founders of religious orders; past the martyrs flashing like myriad flames, grouped in form of the crucified; past the "silvery whiteness," the realm of great kings, fashioned as a mystic eagle; past the "crystal" of the contemplatives, ascending and descending the mystic ladder; upward, like a whirlwind, to the strains of the *Regina Cæli*; past the heaven of the fixed stars, the abode of the apostles, illuminated with a new fount of light, the glory of the Sacred Humanity; past the sparkling and blazing choirs of the angelic hosts, into the empyrean itself.

Beatrice now calls attention to the three conditions of bliss there perfectly fulfilled.

First the intellectual light which enables God to be seen, the love which follows from the sight ; lastly, the joy consequent on the eternal possession of the infinite good :

The Heaven that is unbodied light ;
Light intellectual, replete with love ;
Love of true happiness, replete with joy ;
Joy that transcends all sweetness of delight.

(Par. xxx, 40.)

This is the Heaven of heavens, the abode of God and of all the elect, beyond all limits of time and space, beyond all things material and corporeal. Suddenly streams of living radiance, the “Lumen gloriæ” descend upon the poet, strengthen him to bear the Beatific Vision, and make him, human though he be, like God Himself :

As when the lightning, in a sudden spleen
Unfolded, dashes from the blinding eyes
The visive spirits, dazzled and bedimm'd,
So round about me fulminating streams
Of living radiance play'd, and left me swathed
And veil'd in dense impenetrable blaze.
Such weal is in the love that stills this heaven ;
For its own flame the torch thus fitting ever.

No sooner to my listening ear had come
The brief assurance, than I understood
New virtue into me infused, and sight
Kindled afresh, with vigour to sustain
Excess of light however pure. (Par. xxx, 47.)

Thus begins the union beatified of man's soul with God. The poetic action, it will be observed, requires a supposed progress in the attainment of the Beatific Vision. Only partially manifested through the glory reflected in the nine spheres of saints and angels, it is more fully disclosed in the empyrean, yet more so in the mystic rose, where God is beheld as Creator through the Word ; finally, the divine Essence, the ever-blessed Trinity, and the Incarnate Word in their midst, open to sight. Gradually, then, the divine Being is revealed to him, first under the figure of a stream of light, a scriptural image from Dan. vii, 10: "A swift stream of fire issued forth from before him." The stream flows in wondrous effulgence between banks enamelled with flowers, which are the transfigured souls of the blessed :

Banks on either side, painted with spring,
 Incredible how fair ; and from the tide
 There ever and anon, outstarting, flew
 Sparkles instinct with life ; and in the flowers
 Did set them, like to rubies chased in gold :
 Then, as if drunk with odours, plunged again
 Into the wondrous flood. (Par. xxx, 63.)

The sparkles are the angels, now ascending to God, now descending to the blessed. Beatrice tells Dante that before his thirst to see God face to face can be satisfied, he must drink of the River of Life; what he has seen are but images of the divine Essence :

This stream, and these forth issuing from its gulf
 And diving back, a living topaz each,
 With all this laughter on its bloomy shores,
 Are but a preface, shadowy of the truth
 They emblem : not that in themselves the things
 Are crude ; but on thy part is the defect,
 For that thy views not yet aspire so high.

(Par. xxx, 77.)

His eyes are bathed in that stream of light, and gradually made fit to see God. Suddenly type and figure vanish, and the two courts of

heaven—angels and men—are revealed in all their splendour. The stream swells into a vast ocean of light, whilst circling all around, filling every part, and reflected in the crystal surface, are the countless multitudes of the redeemed who form the petals of the mystic rose :

 Into the yellow of the rose
Perennial, which, in bright expansiveness
Lays forth its gradual blooming redolent
Of praise to the never-wintering sun,
As one who fain would speak yet holds his peace
Beatrice led me. (Par. xxx, 122-127.)

This image is drawn from the golden rose. The “*rosa aurea*,” of pure gold, inwrought with rubies and other gems, is solemnly blessed by the Pope on *Laetare*, Mid-Lent Sunday, as an emblem of Christ who is “the flower of the field and the lily of the valley, and as a sign of the joy of the Church triumphant and militant in Him.”

The mystic rose is illumined by the beams of divine light which descend upon and within it, and again stream forth to the

uttermost horizon of the crystalline heaven, energizing it with life and power. God in His relation to the world which He created in and through His Son, is here the sole object of the poet's contemplation. The natural law by which we see near objects most clearly holds no more. At one glance Dante surveys the whole circumference of the rose, even to its inmost petals :

O prime Enlightener ! Thou who gavest me
strength
On the high triumph of thy realm to gaze !
Grant virtue now to utter what I kenn'd.
There is in heaven a light, whose goodly shine
Makes the Creator visible to all
Created that in seeing Him alone
Have peace ; and in a circle spreads so far,
That the circumference were too loose a zone
To girdle in the sun. All is one beam
Reflected from the summit of the first
That moves which being hence and vigour takes
And as some cliff, that from the bottom eyes
His image mirror'd in the crystal flood,
As if to admire his brave apparrelling
Of verdure and of flowers ; so round about,
Eying the light, on more than million thrones,

Stood eminent, whatever from the earth
Has to the skies return'd. How wide the leaves,
Extended to their utmost, of this rose
Whose lowest step embosoms such a space
Of ample radiance ! Yet, nor amplitude
Nor height impeded, but my view with ease
Took in the full dimensions of that joy.
Near or remote, what there avails, where God
Immediate rules and Nature, awed, suspends
Her sway ? (Par. xxx, 97.)

Beatrice leads the poet into the midst of the rose ; between its petals and the divine Light float angels, ascending and descending. From hence he contemplates the vast company of the redeemed. Upon a still vacant throne lies a crown destined for the Emperor Henry VII, who entered the unseen world before the poet.

Dante's growing amazement at the glorious vision before him is compared to the mute wonder of the barbarians as they marched into imperial Rome :

I, who then
From human to divine had passed, from time
Unto eternity, and out of Florence

To justice and to truth, how might I choose
 But marvel too? 'Twixt gladness and amaze,
 In sooth, no will had I to utter aught,
 Or hear. And, as a pilgrim, when he rests
 Within the temple of his vow, looks round
 In breathless awe, and hopes some time to tell
 Of all its goodly state ; e'en so mine eyes
 Coursed up and down along the living light,
 Now low, and now aloft, and now around,
 Visiting every step. Looks I beheld
 Where Charity in soft persuasion sat ;
 Smiles from within, and radiance from above ;
 And in each gesture, grace and honour high.

(Par. xxxi, 33.)

The poet turns to question Beatrice, but
 she has vanished, and in her place by his
 side stands an old man :

Robed, as the rest, in glory. Joy benign
 Glow'd in his eye, and o'er his cheek diffused
 With gestures such as spake a father's love.

(Par. xxxi, 56.)

Here is St Bernard, the inspired panegyrist of our Blessed Lady, "her own faithful Bernard." (Par. xxxi, 93.) The mission of Beatrice is fulfilled, and she resumes

her place in the third circle of the heavenly rose. Dante recognizes her clearly as she sits exalted high above him on the throne where her merit hath placed her, her brow crowned with a wreath illumined by the eternal beams. Once again he addresses her :

Thy liberal bounty still toward me keep :
That when my spirit, which thou madest whole,
Is loosened from this body, it may find
Favour with thee. (Par. xxxi, 78.)

And once again :

She, so distant, as appeared, look'd down
And smiled. (Par. xxxi, 82.)

Henceforth Dante is committed to the guidance of St Bernard. At the saint's command, Dante raises his eyes to the loftiest of the celestial spheres. There, enthroned in majesty, he beholds Mary, "the Queen that of this realm was sovran."* Around her throne the heavens are irra-

* Par. xxxi, 108.

diated with surpassing splendour, and thousands of angels minister to her:

At their glee
And carol, smiled the Lovely One of Heaven,
And joy was in the eyes of all the blest.

(Par. xxxi, 123.)

Beneath our Lady's feet sits Eve, she "who opened first the wound which Mary healed." Rachel is placed below Eve; near her, Beatrice. On the descending steps are seated the ancestresses of Christ, Sara, Rebecca, Judith, Ruth. Below the sea of light which forms the calix of the mystic rose are placed St John Baptist, St Francis, St Benedict, and others in due gradation. By these two lines the rose is divided into two parts, occupied respectively by those who believed in Christ before and after His Advent, the number of the latter being, of course, incomplete. St Augustine, the founder of scientific theology in the West; St Francis, the representative of the religious life; St Benedict, the founder of the Benedictine Order, so rich in preachers of the

faith, are here; for they bore Christ spiritually, as the line of Hebrew women bore Him in the flesh. To the left of Mary is seated Adam, father of the Old Covenant; to her right, St Peter, the father and rock upon whom is founded the Church of the New Covenant. Next to Adam is Moses, who foretold the destinies of the Church of the Old Covenant. Near St Peter is St John, the seer of Patmos and the prophet of the New Covenant. To the right of St John Baptist is St Anne (grace), mother of the Blessed Virgin; to his left, facing Adam, is St Lucy (illuminative grace). In the centre of the mystic rose, the souls of baptized infants surround the sea of light.

St Bernard, whom Mary's charms "Embellished, as the sun the morning star" (Par. xxxii, 95, 96) implores her aid to obtain Dante the fulness of the Beatific Vision :

O Virgin Mary, daughter of thy Son !
Created beings all in lowliness
Surpassing, as in height above them all ;
Term by the eternal counsel pre-ordained ;

Ennobler of thy nature, so advanced
 In thee, that its great Maker did not scorn
 To make Himself His own creation ;
 For in thy womb rekindling shone the love
 Reveal'd, whose genial influence makes now
 This flower to germin in eternal peace :
 Here thou to us, of charity and love,
 Art, as the noon-day torch ; and art, beneath
 To mortal men, of hope a living spring.
 So mighty art thou, lady, and so great,
 That he, who grace desireth, and comes not
 To thee for aidance, fain would have desire
 Fly without wings. Not only him who asks
 Thy bounty succours ; but doth freely oft
 Forerun the asking. Whatsoe'er may be
 Of excellence in creature—pity mild,
 Relenting mercy, large munificence—
 Are all combined in thee. (Par. xxxiii, 1-22.)

At her prayer, the Vision itself is granted
 him. Supernaturally strengthened, the poet
 lifts his gaze,

and in that depth
 Saw in one volume clasp'd of love, whate'er
 The universe unfolds ; all properties
 Of substance and of accident, beheld
 Compounded, yet one individual light
 The whole. And of such bond methinks I saw
 The universal form ; for that whene'er

I do but speak of it, my soul dilates
Beyond her proper self. (Par. xxxiii, 80-88.)

The mystery of the holy Trinity is disclosed as far as is possible to the created intellect. With unfaltering power the poet describes how the three divine Persons, though really distinct from each other, are one in the same essence.

In that abyss
Of radiance, clear and lofty, methought
Three orbs of triple hue, clipt in one bound
And, from another, one reflected seemed.
As rainbow is from rainbow, and the third
Seemed fire, breathed equally from both.

(Par. xxxiii, 107-112.)

Gazing on this abyss of eternal light, Dante beholds within the second of the coequal orbs "our image painted," that is the sacred Humanity illuminated by its own proper light, the effulgence of the divine Person. Dante is still intent on this wonder, but unable to fathom it, when a lightning flash unfolds all, and the poet's whole being, mind, heart and will, are perfected in union with God.

Here vigour failed the towering phantasy ;
But yet the will rolled onward, like a wheel
In even motion, by the Love impell'd
That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.
(Par. xxxiii, 132.)

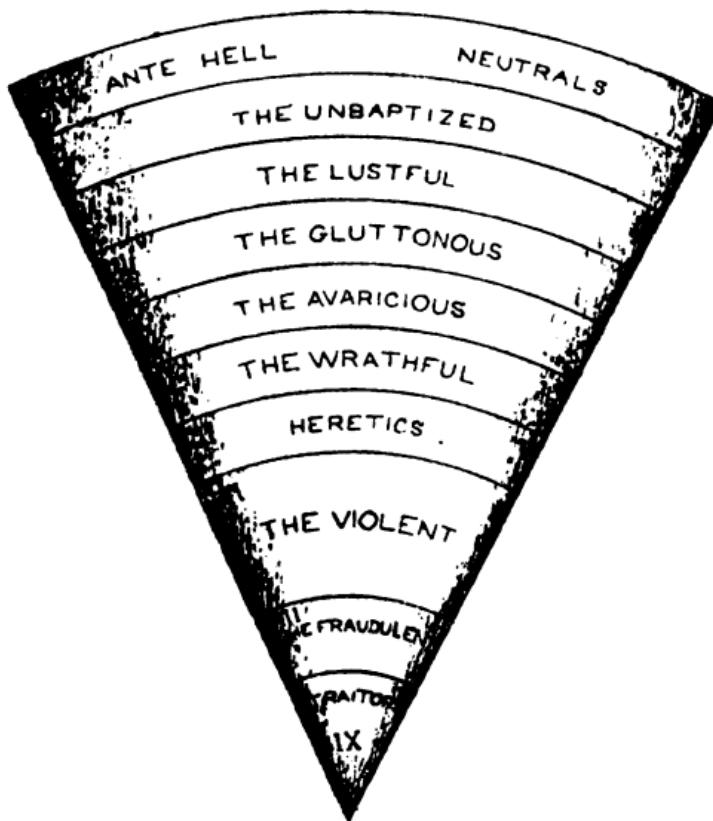
In this brief summary of Dante's life and works we have endeavoured to give prominence to what we believe to be their main interest. An ever-growing literature deals successively with his political relations, his historical and personal allusions, his family and children, the chronology of his poems, his use of the classics, his actual and possible journeys, his denunciation of popes and ecclesiastics, all which subjects have of course their own importance; but that importance is minor and subordinate. The dominant theme and purpose of his great work was, as he tells us himself, to relate the way of fallen man to God. And he finds that true way only by the teaching of theology and St Thomas, and the practice of his faith.

All that he saw, felt, imagined, knew,

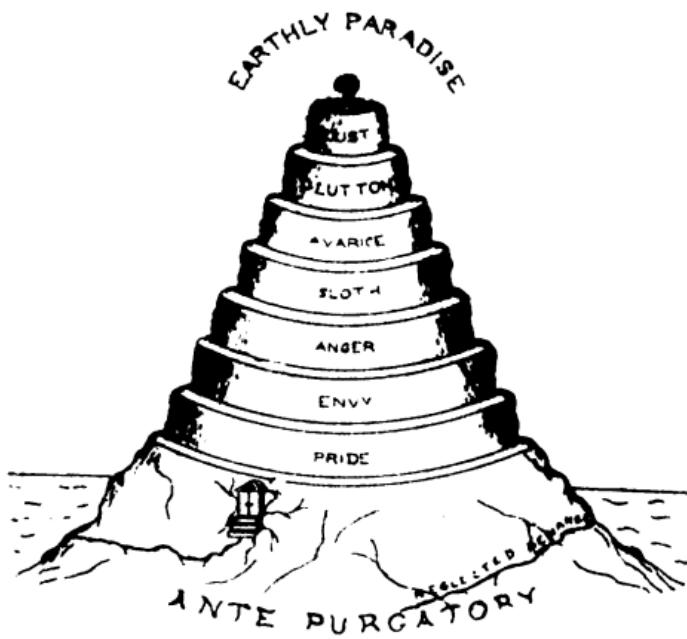
found its marvellous unity and comprehensiveness, because viewed through the medium of that higher light. He is wonderful in his observations of nature, in his detection of its correlations and harmonies, in his knowledge of man, body and soul ; but above all, in his analysis of our fallen nature, and of the operations of grace. And these two factors, sin and its antidote, are within the personal experience of every son of Adam, but they are the peculiar possession of each child of the Church. Such a one will find in the "Commedia" the history of his own life ; his past transgressions and their bitter fruit ; the arduous struggle of mounting the hill of purification ; the marvellous joy of confession, when the waters of Eunoe wash clean both foul stains and evil memories ; and even here, in our ignorance, doubt and depression, the soul, under the touch of grace, is not a stranger to the overpowering harmonies, the flashing lights, the inexpressible beauty, and all satisfying peace of the "Paradiso." The

“Commedia” is open to all, but to the Catholic who loves his faith, the “sacro poema,” pulsating with that love, brings the message from “patria” “Risurgi e vinci” (Par. xiv, 125).

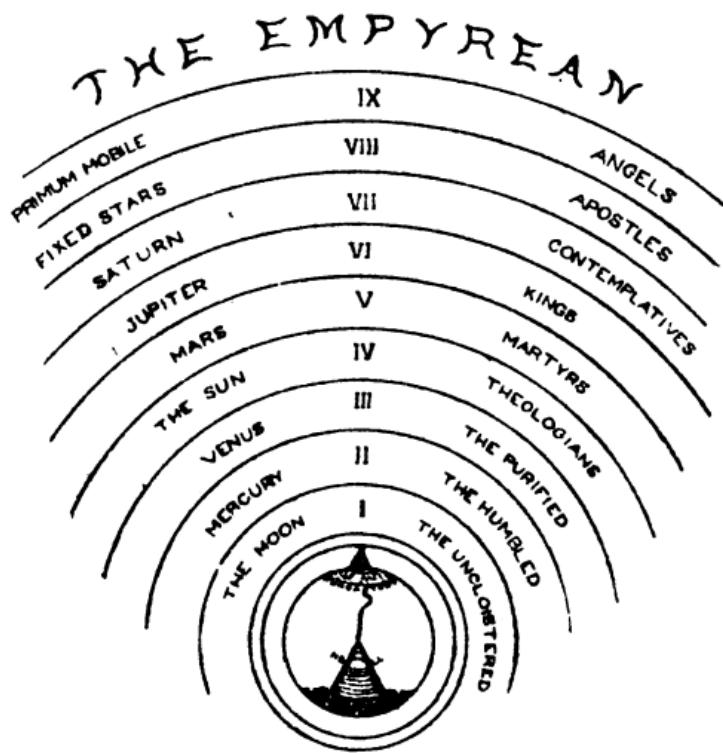
Questo (poema) fratre, sta sepulto.
Agli occhi di ciascuno, il cui ingegno
Nella fiamma d'amor non è adulto.
(Par. vii, 58-61.)



HELL.



PURGATORY.



PARADISE.

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